

Collaboration, cooperation ... results



Vermont State Rehabilitation Council
Annual Report 2010

State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs)

Joelle Brouner, Executive Director of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council; used by permission.

State Rehabilitation Councils were born out of the tradition of effective advocacy by people with disabilities committed to the success of the publicly-funded Vocational Rehabilitation program. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first disability civil rights law to be enacted in the United States. The victory was marred when the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) delayed endorsement of the regulations needed to implement the law.

By April of 1977, frustration mounted and disability-rights advocates took direct action by leading sit-ins in Washington, D.C., New York, and San Francisco to pressure HEW to issue the regulations. While the protests in Washington and New York were short-lived, advocates in San Francisco persisted. They occupied the offices of HEW for four weeks. As a consequence, Joseph Califano, the secretary of HEW, endorsed the regulations. The Rehabilitation Act is the federal law that establishes the publicly-funded Vocational Rehabilitation Program as we know it today.

The advocacy did not end in 1977. Since that time disability-rights advocates have continued work in service of a system that affords opportunities for customers of the Vocational Rehabilitation program to have more choices on their journeys toward employment. During the reauthorization process of the Rehabilitation Act in 1993, advocates built on their tradition of effectiveness by persuading Congress to create State Rehabilitation Councils (under Title I, section 105) as a mechanism to support people with disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation services to take an active role in shaping the services they receive.

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Creating Opportunity, Creating Jobs
Resources for Growth, for Our Future

The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

Vermont's State Rehabilitation Council advocates for consumer-directed and effective vocational services and for the creation of resources and services that will result in equal opportunities for Vermonters with disabilities.

Under its mandate in the Rehabilitation Act, it "shall review, analyze and advise the designated state unit regarding the performance of the responsibilities of the unit...particularly responsibilities relating to...eligibility (including order of selection); extent, scope and effectiveness of services provided; and functions performed by state agencies that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving rehabilitation goals..."

To meet its mission, the Council meets on a bimonthly basis five times a year. (There are no meetings in July or August.) SRC committees meet between full Council meetings to help conduct Council business.

From the Co-Chairs of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

Fiscal Year 2010, which ended September 30, 2010, was very productive for the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC).

The following committee reports summarize the hard work and accomplishments of the Policy and Procedures; Advocacy, Outreach and Education; and Performance Review committees, respectively. In brief, the Policy and Procedures Committee completed its comprehensive review of the DVR policy and procedures manual and then started over from the beginning. They also undertook a review of the SRC By-Laws and considered several proposed new chapters or sections. The Performance Review Committee launched a new approach to performing the Needs Assessment, a task the Council is mandated to undertake every three years. This time, instead of a literature search and focus groups conducted by an outside contractor, the Needs Assessment will be based on a thorough-going, penetrating analysis by the Committee of a variety of existing data sources and measures. The Advocacy, Outreach and Education Committee established itself as a working committee, identified key legislative and policy issues, and began actively advocating for them.

One of the novel and fruitful projects of the SRC this past year was what we came to call the “Not-So-Secret Shopper Project.” Individual Council members

visited the DVR district offices where they completed an application for services, experienced VR orientation, and had an initial interview. The Council decided that it would be unfair to local VR staff for SRC members to visit their offices without their being forewarned. Even though staff had full advance notice, we felt that the visits were highly productive in terms of observations and suggestions for improving customer service at the district office level.

One of us, Michele, has completed two full terms, six active years on the SRC, and therefore her terms as Council member and Co-Chair are expiring. The other Co-Chair, Neal, in his first term on the SRC, looks forward to continuing service as an advocate for people with disabilities in Vermont.

It is an exciting time to be involved with VocRehab Vermont, one of the most innovative and effective vocational rehabilitation agencies in the U.S. The SRC is always looking for new members, including people with disabilities. If you are interested in the opportunity to serve the State of Vermont and the community of people with disabilities as an SRC member, please feel free to contact the SRC Coordinator at the address on the back cover of this report.

Michele Hubert

Michele Hubert, Co-Chair

P. Neal Meier

P. Neal Meier, Ph.D., Co-Chair



photo: Jim Rader



From the Director of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



photo: P. Neal Meier

VocRehab Vermont has completed another successful year helping Vermonters with disabilities to work in their communities. Although we only attained 97% of the prior year's employment outcomes in FFY 2010, this past federal fiscal year we exceeded both last year and FFY 2009, all this in the aftermath of the greatest recession since the Great Depression. Our staff are capable and committed, and they go the extra mile for our customers.

We have continued our strong partnership with the SRC. They conducted "not-so-secret shopper" visits to all VR offices where members personally experienced the intake and application process. They provided us valuable feedback for enhancing and improving our work with customers.

In the last year, we have implemented Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS), an initiative to make employment a primary outcome indicator across the Vermont Agency of Human Services. Twelve CWS Employment Teams have been created and are meeting on a regular basis to coordinate employer outreach. Eleven Business Account Managers have been hired to facilitate the teams. They will open doors to many more employers for our customers. Two Employment Institutes were convened for employment staff across the agency in June and November. A training certificate program is being developed for employment staff across the state. There is still much work to be done as we build the infrastructure to take CWS

to the next level in partnership with the SRC.

We have rolled out a new statewide program to serve people with disabilities who receive state funded emergency assistance, known as General Assistance. Six new VR counselors and eight new VABIR employment training specialists will work with the 800 people who are chronic GA recipients toward the goal of employment. Thanks to the outstanding work of the program coordinator and her supervisor, we implemented this program within a matter of months and are now fully operational. People who previously received only a check are now receiving vocational counseling, guidance, and assistance in finding a job in addition to the financial benefit.

A new integrated, automated case management system will soon be in the development stages. This system will dramatically improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our federal reporting. Most importantly, it will allow access to information that will assist counselors and all staff to better manage their caseloads and serve their customers. This has been a long time coming; staff are excited about the possibilities for less paper and better data.

We remain committed to continuous improvement and are constantly working to improve the satisfaction levels for both of our customers—the employer and the job seeker with a disability.

The Year in Review — Summary SRC Committee Reports

Policy and Procedures Committee

Don Parrish, Chair

In the last Annual Report, it was reported that the Policy and Procedures Committee had just finished a three-year cycle in reviewing the Policy and Procedures Manual. This past year, after holding public hearings for input, the Council has approved the changes presented and the Committee has started a new review and has worked hard to suggest further changes to the manual that reflect best practices, while maintaining compliance with federal regulations.

Supported Employment

Over the year, the SRC partnered with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and other stakeholders by forming a workgroup to discuss the current policies regarding the Supported Employment Program conducted through DVR by outside contracts with Designated Agencies (DAs). The questions raised were:

- Does VR Policy articulate best practices?
- Is there a lack of a systematic framework?
- Does there need to be more consistency in the overall program?

This workgroup met once and discussed the above issues, which led to a more systematic framework and more outcome-based contracts with the DAs. The SRC hopes to follow up on this

issue in the coming year and make any further changes to the Policy Manual that would articulate best practices and provide better guidelines for more consistency in the program statewide.

Casework Standards

It was decided by DVR staff that now would be the time to promote a new chapter in the Policy and Procedures Manual on Casework Standards, the purpose of which is to set consistent and minimum standards for VocRehab casework across the Division. VocRehab staff drafted a version for review by the SRC, which the latter spent most of a committee meeting reviewing and suggesting changes that would conform to our task of providing guidance on these standards.

One of the conclusions reached by the end of discussion was that DVR should increase its oversight of supported employment services provided by outside agencies. It was also decided that the draft needed to be edited for length and style to be consistent with other chapters. This year, the Committee will be reviewing this chapter again after it is extensively rewritten and cleaned up to reflect the Committee's comments, but not before the VR staff and Management Team have had a chance to review it.

By-Laws Review

The Committee did an extensive review of the current By-Laws that had not been reviewed or updated since 2002. Most of the changes made were for clarity and to more accurately reflect the functions of the Council as stated in the federal regulations.

The previous By-Laws held that the Council be run by Co-Chairs. After considerable discussion relating to the pros and cons of this system, the Committee recommended that these positions be changed to Chair and Vice-Chair. The protocol for electing new officers in the event of a resignation was made clearer, while committees and workgroups were better defined and delineated also.

Finally, the most controversial recommended change to the By-Laws was the suggestion that the Director of Vocational Rehabilitation not be allowed to call a meeting of the SRC on his or her own volition. The Committee agreed that it was a matter of autonomy that would dictate this change. The new revision allows that the Chair should give special consideration to any request made by the DVR Director, but does not allow the Director authority over the Council. The current By-Laws require one-third (1/3) of voting members to call a special meeting, and it did not seem consistent with the intent of the federal regulations to allow an ex-officio, non-voting

member of the Council to have that much authority over an autonomous body. The revised By-Laws will be presented to the Full Council for ratification this coming year.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all the members of the Policy and Procedures Committee should be commended for their dedication and commitment to this process that is so important to ensure that advocacy for “consumer-directed and effective vocational services” is maintained and that these services and resources will provide for equal opportunities for all individuals with disabilities.



photo: Jim Rader

Advocacy, Outreach and Education Committee

Sam Liss, Chair

In its second year of existence, the Advocacy, Outreach and Education (AOE) Committee of the SRC began clearly striding forward on a number of issues. After an initial period gathering information and educating itself on many key issues, the Committee has begun to set goals and adopt positions in its quest to promote optimum conditions for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

The AOE Committee is committed to a partnership with employer networks, and with the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), for which the SRC is charged with an advisory and oversight role. It has also begun to collaborate with a range of other organizations with mutual interests. The added influence of this collaboration has already proven beneficial.

Advocacy

At the Committee's recommendation, the SRC—in collaboration with the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), the Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL), and potentially other entities—has adopted a position endorsing adequate health care for persons with disabilities seeking and maintaining employment. Such a stance, which emphasizes continuous availability of health care coverage to maximize socioeconomic productivity, has melded constructively with State

efforts toward a system of affordable health care for all of its citizens. The SRC, in partnership, testified to that end before the Joint Legislative Committee on Health Care.

The AOE Committee, on behalf of the SRC, has taken a leadership role within the State in promoting the elimination of inherent disincentives to employment for persons with disabilities. Along with the SILC and VCIL, it has been charged with developing a coherent approach for relevant State entities to find realistic solutions to challenges in this area. Tangible steps have been taken to modify the State Medicaid for Working Persons with Disabilities Program (MWPDP) with this goal in mind.

The Committee has also been advocating for elimination of work disincentives on a national level. Jim Pontbriand, regional work incentive coordinator for the Social Security Administration, presented before the Committee regarding SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) 1:2 demonstration project developments, as well as the WISP (Work Incentive Simplification Plan), a questionable national initiative with regard to the elimination of such disincentives.

The Committee has also focused nationally on advocacy for reauthorization of the Rehab Act (as part of the Workforce Investment Act), of WIPA (Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Act), and other areas key to the mission of DVR. A committed

partnership of the SRC and DVR toward national networking has been helpful to this end including attendance at national conferences, Congressional advocacy, and regular national teleconferences.

The Committee has been a key partner in supporting development of Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS) and enhancing the effectiveness of this burgeoning and ambitious program. The Committee stands ready to collaborate and cooperate with DVR on any and all initiatives brought before it.

Outreach and Education

The AOE Committee has been expanding its outreach with regard to the State network of Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and the State Workforce Development Council (WDC). Chip Evans, Executive Director of the WDC, presented before the Committee in anticipation of future cooperation.

The Committee also has a keen interest in collaborating with veterans' groups and in working jointly with DVR to promote optimal workforce conditions for the State's veterans returning from duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. It looks forward to dedicated work in this arena in the near future.

The AOE Committee has not yet fulfilled its objective of regularly-scheduled legislative outreach events, including events in concert with Chambers of Commerce throughout

the State. However, both the Committee and its DVR partners have pledged to accelerate such initiatives. The Committee feels this educational approach is critical to its long-term mission.

Monitoring Impacts

The Committee has been continuously monitoring State budgetary developments in the current challenging fiscal atmosphere and has been noting budgetary impacts on the policies, programs, and services which affect persons with disabilities seeking or maintaining employment. The impact of the "Challenges for Change" (C4C) initiative, in its many facets, has been given significant attention by the Committee. Dedicated Committee members have been actively monitoring and critiquing both the positive and negative implications of C4C, as well as the "Modernization" effort of State government.

Conclusion

In summary, the Committee has an expansive, extensive and critical charge. It has been inexorably striding in the direction of fulfilling its key goals, all of which are meant to improve vocational rehabilitation prospects for the State and nation. Hopefully, DVR's and the SRC's dual consumers—employees with disabilities and their real and potential employers—have felt the benefits of the Committee's efforts.



photo: Meg Pond

Performance Review Committee

Christine McCarthy, Chair

2010 Work and Accomplishments

The Performance Review committee monitors and analyzes how well the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is serving its customers.

It gives input to the full SRC regarding development of measures of performance (including the Needs Assessment survey and Customer Satisfaction and Employer Satisfaction surveys). It reviews available statistical data and measures of performance, and makes recommendations to the full SRC regarding the content of the State Plan.

DVR collects data from a variety of sources to analyze the work performed by the Agency. Additionally they are required to submit a yearly report to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) on the variety of standards and indicators they are required to meet.

The Needs Assessment

DVR and the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) are required to jointly conduct a needs assessment every three years.

The Needs Assessment is intended to form the basis for the VR annual state plan and the Division's strategic planning activities. The development of the Needs Assessment in partnership with DVR is one of the primary responsibilities of the SRC.

In the past an outside contractor has been used to conduct the Needs Assessment. This initially allowed DVR and the SRC to obtain an external view of the organization. Over time, however, the results became too general, and did not delve deeper into the needs of consumers. DVR conducts multiple surveys of consumers, employees and employers on a regular basis. DVR and the SRC agreed that using all of the data that is gathered might better serve as the basis for the 2011 Needs Assessment.

Accordingly, in December 2009, the SRC proposed to incorporate relevant data to inform the needs assessment. The focus of 2010 was working on this needs assessment, which has yielded a deeper look at our needs than was done previously by an outside consultant utilizing focus groups.

The SRC Performance Review Committee in partnership with James Smith, the DVR Budget and Policy Manager, developed a work plan for the Needs Assessment. As a first step the group identified the sources they wanted to review over a year period. The committee then developed a plan to have smaller groups look in-depth at the most recent data collected. From January 2010 through October 2010, the Performance Review Committee members divided into work groups of two and three and reviewed the following:

- **Consumer Satisfaction Survey**—A phone survey of 700 DVR consumers, this survey speaks directly to the needs of persons with disabilities.
- **Employer Satisfaction Survey**—This phone survey of 300 Vermont employers speaks to the needs of the employer and looks at their perspective on DVR services.
- **RSA Standards and Indicators**—These measure VR consumer outcome data against Federal standards.
- **Baldrige Survey**—This quality improvement survey of all staff and management provides feedback on how to improve services.
- **Employee Satisfaction Survey**—A survey of all staff focused on operational issues, this identifies challenges and opportunities faced by staff.

After reviewing the data sources, the smaller work groups reported to the Performance Review Committee.

In addition to the above data sources, the Performance Review Committee conducted “Not-So-Secret Shopper” visits to each of DVR District Offices. The concept was for SRC members to experience the DVR application and orientation process.

Additional Research Questions

In June 2010 the Performance Review Committee also developed a list of additional research questions to be submitted to the DVR Planning & Evaluation Unit. These included:

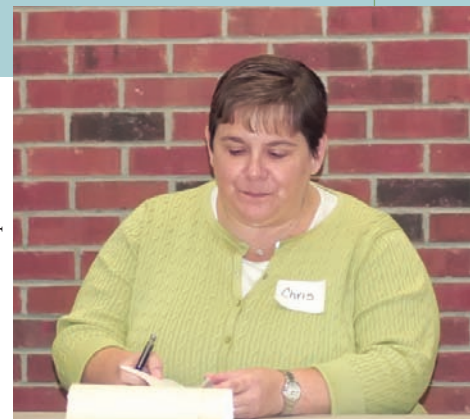
- Do we have adequate DVR services for minority individuals?
- What are the projected needs for services given the aging population in Vermont?
- Will DVR have more or fewer applicants over time?
- What will the impact be on the order of selection?
- How should we develop services to veterans?
- What are the outcome comparisons across different disability groups?

Recommendations to the Full SRC

The “Not-So-Secret Shopper” visits have inspired DVR to examine the application and orientation process in offices across the State of Vermont. In addition, we see the need to explore ways to streamline paperwork to facilitate more efficiency both on the part of VR counselors and their customers.

We feel confident that the latest Needs Assessment will result in a far more comprehensive review of VR needs in the state.

photo: Don Parrish



In photo at right: Council and staff at Union Institute and University, December 2009. Left to right: P. Neal Meier, James Smith (staff), Karen Hussey, Jennifer Alexander-Whitmore, Martha Frank, Jim Rader (staff), Michele Hubert, William Pendlebury, Don Parrish, David Townsend, Ellie Marshall, Diane Dalmasse, John Spinney, Sam Liss, John Alexander, and Whitney Nichols. Not pictured: Christine Kilpatrick, Sarah Launderville, and Christine McCarthy.

photo: Meg Pond



Vermont State Rehabilitation Council Members, 2010

Steering Committee

Michele Hubert, Brownington, Co-Chair (AO&E; P&P; PR)

P. Neal Meier, Ph.D., Georgia, Co-Chair (P&P; PR)

Diane Dalmasse, Stowe, Director, DVR (AO&E)

Sam Liss, Sunderland, (AO&E (chair); P&P)

Christine McCarthy, Williston (AO&E; PR (chair))

Don Parrish, Shrewsbury (AO&E; P&P (chair); PR)

Other Council Members

John Alexander, West Burke (AO&E; P&P; PR)

Martha Frank, Burlington (AO&E; P&P)

Karen Hussey, South Hero (P&P)

Christine Kilpatrick, Burlington (AO&E)

Sarah Launderville, Williamstown (AO&E)

Ellie Marshall, Bradford (AO&E)

Whitney Nichols, Brattleboro (AO&E)

William Pendlebury, Brattleboro (P&P; PR)

John Spinney, Waterbury (P&P; PR)

David Townsend, Rutland (PR)

Jennifer Alexander-Whitmore, Brownington (AO&E; P&P; PR)

Support Staff

Jim Rader, Coordinator

James Smith, South Burlington, Budget & Policy Manager,
DVR (DVR liaison to the SRC)

AO&E = Advocacy, Outreach & Education Committee

P&P = Policy & Procedures Committee

PR = Performance Review Committee

The SRC at Work— a Photo Montage



photos: Jim Rader and Don Parrish

VR's Contribution to Vermonters with Disabilities and Their Communities

Creating Opportunity, Creating Jobs

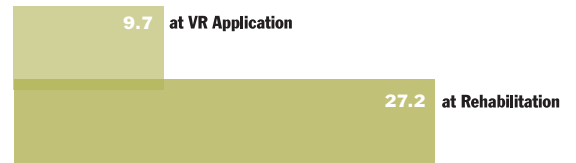
VocRehab Vermont's core mission is to realize human potential by putting meaningful work within reach of Vermonters with significant disabilities.

We help VR consumers figure out what work will work for them through careful assessment, counseling and guidance from our expert staff.

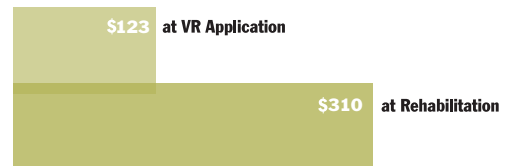
We capitalize on our extensive networks in the employer community to create job opportunities and make good placements that match employer needs with jobseeker skills, and help employers retain staff with disabilities.

We use our financial resources within Vermont communities to support our consumers as they transition to stable employment, and our employers as they try out new workers.

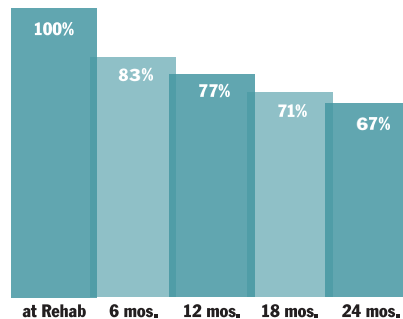
Change in Average Hours Worked Per Week



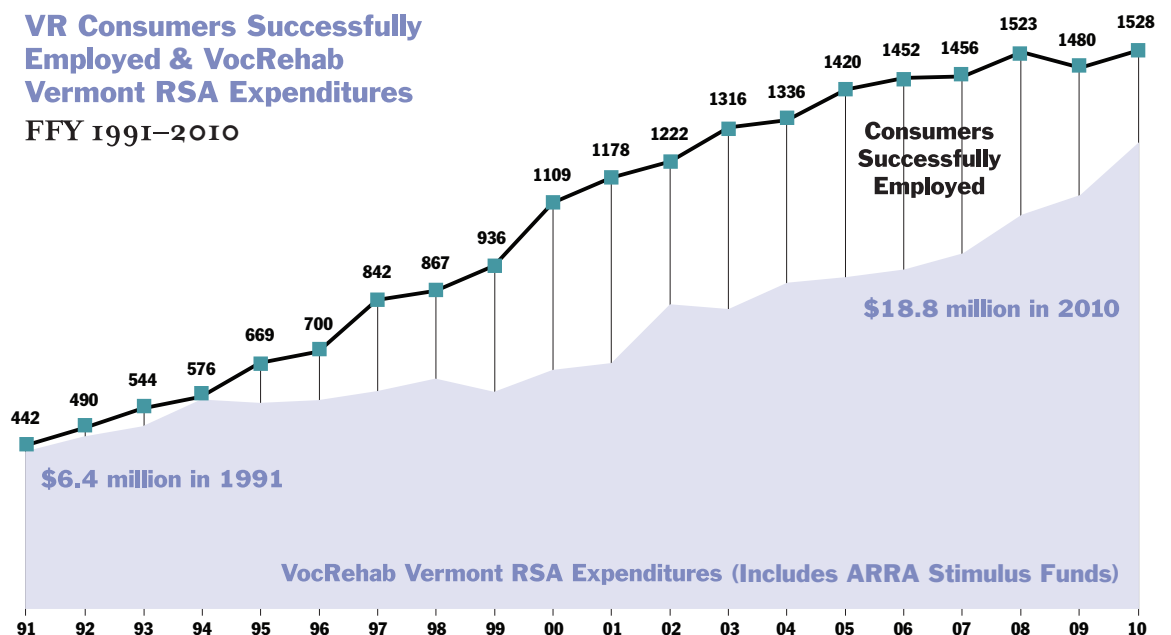
Change in Average Weekly Earnings



Employment Retention Rate, VR Consumers Closed Successfully from FFY 2005-07



VR Consumers Successfully Employed & VocRehab Vermont RSA Expenditures FFY 1991-2010



Resources for Growth, for Our Future

VocRehab Vermont is funded primarily by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in the U.S. Department of Education. About 80% of our funding is federal money which goes into the local economies of Vermont towns—to local stores to purchase work tools and clothing; to health care providers and medical equipment suppliers; to community colleges and technical training programs; to transportation providers; and to Vermonters in community agencies who provide support services for workers with disabilities.

Vermont's rankings

RSA ranks public VR agencies on their performance each year. Our record:

*New VR applicants per million state population—*we're doing a great job of reaching out to as many Vermonters as possible.

in New England: 1; in the nation: 1

*VR employment outcomes per million state population—*We're effective in getting Vermonters in for VR services and on to successful employment.

in New England: 1; in the nation: 1

*Average expenditure per employment outcome—*We get results without spending more than we need to, leaving resources for others.

in New England: 1; in the nation: 3

*Ticket participation rate—*We help many SSA beneficiaries return to work and actively claim reimbursement from SSA for these services. As a result, we bring more federal money into the State to serve Vermonters with disabilities.

in New England: 1; in the nation: 1

Creative Workforce Solutions

VocRehab Vermont is taking a leadership role in restructuring the way employment services are provided across the entire Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS). Through Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS)—an idea born within VocRehab but now expanded to all of AHS—employment programs in four departments and seven different divisions are collaborating across population and program silos to improve employment services and coordinate outreach to employers. New ideas central to CWS include:

- **Creating Local Employment Teams** to establish a coordinated and consistent process for managing job placement requests from multiple agencies. Agencies across AHS are now sharing job leads and employer contact information through Salesforce, a web-based customer relations management tool.
- **Dedicating Business Account Managers** in each district to serve local employment teams by providing dedicated outreach to employers and facilitating contacts with employers.
- **Offering Progressive Employment** options that provide funding support to employers for “alternative placement strategies” to help employers and AHS customers test out employment situations in a “low risk” environment supported by employment staff of CWS partners. These funds are used for arrangements such as work trials, internships, and on-the-job training, which often lead to paid employment.



The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is appointed by the Governor. We seek new members who have a wide range of interests and talents to contribute to help improve the services of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to the citizens of Vermont with disabilities. If you are interested in applying to become a member of the SRC, please contact Jim Rader, Coordinator.

Jim Rader, Coordinator
Vermont State Rehabilitation Council
36 Quaker Road, Grand Isle, VT 05458
802-343-5975 jradervt@gmail.com

